

TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides

Research Guide No 47: London Transport Food and Catering

London Transport (LT) was, for many years, an organisation that was almost a family in itself. With more than 80,000 employees in its heyday, it took paternal care of them, and there was an enormous choice of social and sporting activities available.

The importance of good nourishment in workers' lives was taken very seriously, and there was a network of canteens and restaurants at bus depots and stations

providing hot meals and snacks at subsidised prices to its hard-working staff. Higher-paid staff could eat in one of the restaurants at 55 Broadway or at Griffin House, Baker Street. There was also a small fleet of mobile trailer canteens for staff that were unable to attend a regular canteen (LT000104/036). A list of all LT catering outlets can be found in LT000953/018.



Interior of Motor-Canteen - view from back platform.
Interior of Mobile Canteen trailer, 1937. Transport for London Corporate Archives: LT000104/036

Most of the food sold to employees was prepared in-house at Croydon, where, in addition to everyday fare, special cakes were made to order, and seasonal delights such as Christmas puddings and hot cross buns were produced. There was even a Griffin trademark on some items, such as packets of tea.

Although outside catering had been introduced in 1951, when Spiers and Pond were granted leases for certain LT stations (LT001594/001), and automatic vending machines made their appearance (LT000115/237; LT000098/040), the real change to outside catering occurred in the 1990s, by which time large suppliers could provide food more cheaply, and people's eating habits had changed. The proliferation of takeaways, burger bars, coffee shops and other fast food outlets tempted employees away from in-house catering. The running of canteens was outsourced, bigger suppliers being able to produce food more cheaply than LT's own facility at Croydon.

This had begun to wear out, and was uneconomic to repair. A detailed review of the Croydon Food Production Centre was carried out in 1983, which recommended closure by 1988 (LT000953/001; LT000136/010; LT000136/014). Leaflets showing a plan of the Croydon Centre can be found in a series containing LT catering service annual reports which span several dates between 1947 to 1992 (LT001488/002-023).

Good sources of general information on LT catering can be found in the annual reports series (LT000146/030-035, 041, 042, 043-048). There are also copies of *Catering Roundabout* for the years 1964 and 1965, (LT000927/003) as well as June 1968 (LT001634/27), which give a lot of background information on a staff level.

Of particular interest are the files dealing with the World War Two.

LT's tube network was used nightly from September 1940 to May 1945 by shelterers, and the Catering Department played an important part in keeping morale high (LT000341/060, 110, 195;



Tube shelterers being served by LT Catering Staff, a service provided every night from 1940-1945, [1944-1945]. Transport for London Corporate Archives: LT000503/036

What type of food was served in LT food outlets? The archive holds LT Rifle Club menus for 1947 and 1948 (LT000116/067, 070), an a la carte menu for the tenth Floor Dining Club at 55 Broadway (LT000124/038), and everyday menus of the late 1950s (LT000307/024).



A La Carte Menu for the tenth floor Restaurant at 55 Broadway. Transport for London Corporate Archives: LT000124/038

Design has always been important to LT. Pre-war staff facilities set a standard in furnishing and buildings for others to follow (LT000104/036; LT000044/091; LT000621/019).

This tradition continued into the 1990s, especially in regard to the modernisation of Broadway’s catering facilities. As 55 Broadway was LT’s HQ, this prestige was obvious in the attention paid to detail.

At one time there were 3 restaurants at Broadway; ground floor for office staff, the second floor for the Officers’ Dining Club, and the tenth floor for Senior Executives (LT000077/018; LT000245/215; LT000728/081; LT000621/019;

LT000124/038). A colour brochure, *London Regional Transport Catering – a Professional Choice*, shows the proposed alterations to the restaurants on the ground and tenth floor restaurants at 55 Broadway and the Griffin Room at Baker Street (LT000953/003, 004).

Reports on Staff rates of pay, health and safety issues, and staff training can be found in LT000136/019, LT000104/014 and LT000126/035.

The end of the in-house catering tradition came in the early 1990s and is documented in the archives in files LT000926/344, LT000739/00-002 and LT000941/004.

Records of Catering Department meetings can be found in LT000909/101 and 263, LT000953/001-006, LT000232/233, LT000233/533, LT000294/288/021, LT000442/162/006, LT000562/120, LT000927/003, LT000732/111-121, LT001128/009, and LT001119/025. These files contain a lot of financial information, and give an overview of the running of the Catering Department, particularly in the post-war years.